

COLORADO TO KOKO NOR

*The amazing true story
of the CIA's secret war
against Red China*

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By L. FLETCHER PROUTY

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NIGHT HAD obscured the mountains when the Air Force cargo plane finally approached the Pikes Peak country from the west. Wearily, it seemed, the aircraft crossed the south shoulder of the peak, turned left, dropped flaps and began the long, gradual descent to Peterson Field which serves both as an Air Force base and the municipal airport of Colorado Springs.

The landing was uneventful. But from that point some strange things happened.

The aircraft, a heavy-bodied C130 powered by four turbo-prop engines, taxied to a remote end of the field rather than to the regular ramp. A military bus quickly pulled up alongside.

If any outsider had been there to witness some 20 men disembark, he would have been told they were soldiers from India scheduled for training at nearby Ft. Carson under a military aid program.

But the troops weren't Indians and they never got to Ft. Carson.

The loaded bus headed westward out of Colorado Springs, up the Ute Pass highway, and disappeared into the night.

During the months that followed, other men like those in the first contingent arrived periodically in Colorado Springs

the same mysterious manner and vanished into the mountains.

The identity of these men and the nature of their mission makes a fascinating story — and, in some respects, a frightening one — with vast international implications. Recent developments in relations between the United States and Communist China, which portend so much for an era of peace, give that story a special timeliness. The details of this operation are reported here for the first time.

To understand what this hush-hush operation was all about, it is necessary to set the time, which was August 1959, and to recall the ominous twilight zone — neither peace nor war — into which relations between East and West had drifted in that period. With an eye toward the successful culmination of his two-term administration, President Eisenhower announced a series of international events leading to a super-Summit Conference in Paris during May 1960.

The Korean War had settled into an uneasy truce six years earlier, in 1953. The Berlin Wall was still two years in the future, 1961. At the moment the point of East-West friction was at a most unlikely place. Tibet, an almost mythical land to most Americans

who connected it vaguely with a Ronald Coleman movie about Shangri-la.

There is nothing mythical about Tibet. It is an ancient country with an area four times that of Colorado, separated from India to the south by the Himalayan Range, many of whose peaks are twice as tall as Colorado's highest mountains. The country's average elevation is about 15,000 feet. Soon after the Communist government took over control of China in 1949, Peking announced its intentions of "liberating" Tibet. In October 1950 Chinese Communist troops invaded it.

Tibet's spiritual and temporal leader, the Dalai Lama, then only 15 years old, urged his people not to resist. The Chinese in turn left the Dalai Lama alone. But by February of 1959 it became evident the Chinese intended to seize him to gain undisputed control over that country.

Forewarned, the Dalai Lama and about 80 of his followers fled Lhasa, the capital city on March 17, 1959, heading for the safety of India. The Chinese were not aware of the Dalai Lama's departure for several days. They had been lulled by the fact that there were only two good routes out of Lhasa, both under Chinese control, and any caravan leaving for India would have had to

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